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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the findings of a doctoral disseration that examined whether control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan (Canada) school systems was becoming more centralized or decentralized. The study also determined whether critical theory, as defined by Habermas, provided a useful conceptual framework for assessing the research results. Data were obtained from a survey of boards of education, directors of education, district boards, principals, and teachers in each school division; historical analysis; and a modified Delphi technique with 11 prominent individuals in Saskatchewan education. A number of trends were identified that would tend to encourage an increased degree of central control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school systems. However, the data also revealed trends that would encourage a trend toward increased decentralization, such as the consistent trend toward increased parental involvement in education decision making. Findings also suggest that critical theory provided a relatively flexible conceptual framework for assessing research results. Recommendations are made to involve participants in decision making, explore discrepancies between rural and urban attitudes toward decision-making responsibility, and explore linkages between system morale and control over decision making. Three tables and two figures are included. (Contains 39 references.) (LMI)

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RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Centralization of Control Over Educational Decision Making in Saskatchewan

SSTA RESEARCH CENTRE REPORT: #95-16 DATE: Nov 1995

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RESEARCH IN BRIEF

Centralization of Control Over Educational Decision Making in Saskatchewan

SSTA RESEARCH CENTRE REPORT: #95-16 DATE: Nov 1995

This report is a summary of a doctoral dissertation entitled **An Investigation of the Centralization of Control Over Educational Decision Making in Saskatchewan School Divisions** by Larry Steeves.

The study had two major research objectives:

- To determine whether control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school systems was becoming more centralized or decentralized.
- To determine whether critical theory, as defined by Habermas, could be utilized as a conceptual framework for assessing the research results.

Research results identified a number of trends that would tend to encourage an increased degree of control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school systems. However, trends that would encourage a trend towards increased decentralization were revealed. For example, a trend toward increased parental involvement in education decision making was consistently noted.

With respect to the second research objective, the study also suggested that critical theory provided a relatively flexible conceptual framework for assessing research results related to the centralization of decision making in Saskatchewan school systems. A number of recommendations with respect to research outcomes were also identified.

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

This study attempted to:

1. Determine whether control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school systems was becoming more centralized or decentralized.

2. Determine whether critical theory, as defined by Habermas (1987, 1984), could be utilized as a conceptual framework for assessing the research results.

In more practical terms, the study attempted to provide recommendations for future action within the Saskatchewan educational system.

To construct a conceptual model, the work of Habermas (1987, 1984), Mintzberg (1983, 1979), Khadwalla (1977), and Easton (1957) was utilized. The result was a critical model of educational decision making with division boards of education and district boards of trustees representing life-world participants and directors, principals and teachers serving as administrative system representatives.
The research method utilized for the study incorporated a triangulation approach including a quantitative, a qualitative, and a critical dimension. The unit of analysis adopted for the quantitative phase of the study was the school division, which is the basic organizational unit in Saskatchewan education.

Research results included: economic and demographic information from the historical analysis; questionnaire results with respect to issues such as an enhanced future role for directors and a less influential role for district boards; and Delphi results, in particular the potential for consolidation of schools and school division boundaries. These results identified a number of trends that would tend to encourage an increased degree of centralization of control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school divisions. However, trends that would encourage a tendency towards increased decentralization of educational decision making were also revealed. In particular, a trend toward increased parental involvement in decision making was consistently noted.

In conclusion, the study identified differing trends regarding the issue of centralization, or decentralization, of control over educational decision making. The study also suggested that critical theory provided a relatively flexible conceptual framework for assessing the research results related to the centralization of decision making in Saskatchewan school divisions.

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THE PROBLEM

The relative value of centralization versus decentralization has been an ongoing topic of debate among writers focusing upon both organizational productivity and issues of social significance. Organizationally, theorists working within Taylor's (1903) model of scientific management maintain the need for tightly centralized administrative structures in challenging economic times. Others, such as Likert (1976) and Bennis (1966) argue that more participative, democratically based management models are necessary for increased organizational productivity in a changing world. Still other writers (e.g., Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) suggest a contingency based approach, in which the level of centralization varies with the needs of the specific situation. At the organizational level, Khandwalla (1977) sums up the debate.

The relative value of centralization versus decentralization is an ongoing topic of debate among organizational writers.

> Many advantages - and some disadvantages have been claimed for decentralization. Decentralization has been considered a powerful motivator of subordinates because it satisfies their higher order needs for power, autonomy, more meaningful and responsible work, and so on. It has also been claimed to make the organization more flexible and to enable it to respond more rapidly to local contingencies than a centralized organization can. It frees top management from the drudgery of relatively routine decisions so that they can devote attention to strategic, nonrecurring, novel problems. The opponents of decentralization have claimed that it creates too many vested interests, breeds resistance to organization - wide changes, and, therefore, makes the organization vulnerable in a crisis. (pp. 508-509)

The issue of centralization of control over decision making has also received extensive attention by educational theorists. Many writers adopt a wary perspective regarding centralized educational bureaucracies. Carlson (1965), for example, refers to school systems as domesticated organizations that, because basic revenues and students are assured, have no driving need to adjust to changing societal conditions. This, Hoy and Miskel (1982) suggest, has produced a school system that utilizes insensitive, bureaucratic procedures for dealing with students. The need to process large numbers of students results in the diminution of the human aspect of the educational process - an emphasis on technical training rather than the development of the individual has been the primary outcome.

Educational theorists have also studied the issue of centralilzation of educational decision making. Concerns regarding existing centralization of control are often expressed.

Similarly, Bidwell (1965), while discussing the central office and superintendency, describes the emergence of the educational bureaucracy as a response to school modernization and centralization. The legitimate need for an improved educational system resulted in the closure of the small, community based school and its replacement by larger, centralized schools that offered an enhanced program. However, there was a price to be paid for schooling process and an enlarged educational bureaucracy. Increased modernization did occur, but the costs were often high.

Concerns regarding excessive bureaucratization in school systems have been expressed by Hoy and Miskel, Bidwell, and Sergiovanni and Carver.

Other writers also suggest that the results of increased bureaucratization and centralization have not always been positive. Sergiovanni and Carver (1980) indicate that the bureaucratic, authoritarian orientation of schools has failed to meet the self-actualization goals American society has set for its youth. Reich (1983) extends this criticism to the economic sphere, suggesting that the bureaucratic structure of American education has not encouraged the flexible, innovative attitudes required of employees in our current economic situation.

Others challenge this bureaucratic perspective of school systems, suggesting that a more appropriate analogy would be Weick's (1976) "loosely coupled" or March's (1965) "anarchy" perspective. Firestone and Herriot (1984) describe this perspective in educational terms as "organizational settings in which goals are ambiguous, hierarchies of authority are not effective mechanisms of integration, technologies are unclear, and participation is fluId" (p. 43). Arguing that an anarchistic image of educational systems merits consideration, Allison (1983) states that "one of the most striking images of public schools...is that they are essentially subassemblies of regional schooling systems that are themselves subsystems within the state or

Other writers have challenged a bureaucratic perspective of school systems, focusing instead upon more decentralized, fluid descriptors.

national structures" (p. 23).

The existence of such differing opinions regarding the nature of educational organizations may be rooted in the contradictory elements that constitute modern school systems. Modern school systems often concurrently attempt to balance commitments to bureaucratic rationality with support for community and parental involvement in the educational process. Faced with reconciling these diverse characteristics, Mintzberg (1983) suggests that school systems are a dysfunctional organizational configuration. Internal influencers, such as the teaching staff and administration, vie for power with external influencers, such as provincial departments of education or district school boards; the outcome of this power struggle is often instability and confusion.

Different opinions regarding the degree of centralization of control in school systems may be rooted in the contradictory elements that constitute modern school systems.

Mintzberg suggests that school systems are a dysfunctional organizational configuration.

Notwithstanding the heuristic value these diverse conceptualizations have for research regarding educational organizations, this study adopted a framework based on critical theory, as proposed by Habermas (1987). It was argued that his theoretical stance provided the most effective means of understanding the development and current operation of organizations such as school systems. In fact, a critical perspective may well permit the incorporation of all the

The conceptual framework adopted for this study was based upon the work of Habermas, and critical theory.

foregoing heuristic models into one single conceptual framework.

In summary, the issue of utilization of control relates to the primary purpose of this study. It attempted to determine the current status of control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school systems. It also considered both the future and preferred approach to decision making among a variety of stakeholders currently involved in the Saskatchewan educational system. This concern is discussed below in the statement of the problem.

This study attempted to determine the current, future and preferred approach to control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school systems.

Statement of the Problem

Two major purposes were investigated in the study:

1. Was educational decision making in the Province of Saskatchewan becoming more centralized or decentralized? Three primary research methods were utilized. Historical and demographic trends that impact upon Saskatchewan school systems were reviewed.

A questionnaire regarding control over decision making in school systems, and by implication, the relative degree of centralization or decentralization, was distributed to a sample of key stakeholders in each school division. Finally, a Delphi technique, to project future

trends with respect to centralization of control, was conducted with a number of key educational stakeholders in the province.

2. Could critical theory be utilized as a conceptual framework for this study? The value of critical theory as a conceptual framework for assessing changes in control over educational decision making and the resulting implications for centralization or decentralization of control at the level of the Saskatchewan school divisions was also investigated.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Critical Theory: The Problem of Purposive Rationality

Ours is the age of bureaucracy. Whether we look at the private or the public sector, its imprint exists. Galbraith (1978) talks of the "technostructure", while Whyte (1960) refers to the "organization man" and his ready acceptance of organizational dictates. Pugh, Hickson, and Hinings (1983), while discussing the work of Burnham, outline their belief in the development of a managerial society in which "it will be the managers who are dominant, who have power and privilege, who have control over the means of production. In short, the managers will be the ruling class" (p. 212).

Ours is the age of bureaucracy.

These comments are not new. Max Weber, writing at the turn of the century, predicted the growth of bureaucracy as a direct consequence of societal modernization. He suggested (Gerth & Mills, 1958) that the transition from a traditional life-world would encourage an instrumental form of societal rationalization, eventually creating an "iron cage", shaping and twisting individuals to its ends. Weber believed this gradual process of secular rationalization would result in the "disenchantment of the world". He foresaw the traditional life-world, based upon religious beliefs, folk culture and underlying

Weber predicted the growth of bureaucracy. This growth would eventually create the "iron cage".

Secular rationalization, and the growth of bureaucracy, would eventually erode the traditional life-world.

societal assumptions, being gradually eroded through a process of rationalization.

> The extent and direction of 'rationalization' is thus measured negatively in terms of the degree to which manical elements of thought are displaced, or positively by the extent to which ideas gain in systematic coherence and naturalistic consistency. The urge towards such a comprehensive and meaningful interpretation of the universe is ascribed to groups of intellectuals, to religious prophets and teachers, to sages and philosophers, to jurists and experimental artists, and finally, to the empirical scientist. 'Rationalization', socially and historically differentiated, thus comes to have a variety of meanings. (Gerth & Mills, 1958, p. 51)

Weber viewed this process with mixed emotions. Although societal development would result, its progressive rationalization, particularly within an administrative context, would eventually produce the "iron cage", the ultimate bureaucratization of society. McCarthy (Habermas, 1984) suggests that this would occur because Weber believed "the rationality that defines modernity is at bottom a zweckrationalitat, a purposive or means/end rationality, the inherent aim of which is the mastery of the world in the service of human interests" (pp. xviii).

Weber viewed the process of rationalization with mixed emotions. The price paid for societal development would be the progressive bureaucratization of society. Purposive rationality would drive this process.

Although an improved standard of living might result, a price would be paid. McCarthy (Habermas, 1984) states that the traditional life-world would be stripped of ethical meaning with no replacement,

The tradional life would be stripped of ethical meaning with no replacement.

nothing to give "meaning and unity to life" (p. xvii). Weber questioned the ability of society to rationally establish new universally accepted values, fearing that instead, a plethora of competing, often contradictory values would result. As Bernstein (1985) suggests while reviewing Weberian thought, "we must choose the 'gods or demons' we decide to pursue" (p. 5).

Nor was Weber alone in expressing these concerns; many of the same issues were raised by Marx. In his earlier writings, Marx (1985) emphasized that a failure to move in the direction of human emancipation would ensure a capitalist wasteland, replete with worker alienation and repression. Unlike Weber, who saw no escape from this dismal future, Marx envisaged a revolutionary future that would first produce the "dictatorship of the proletariat", eventually fading away, to be replaced by a utopian form of anarchism, in which institutional control systems would be abolished. The impact of Marxist thought was enormous -- both as a revolutionary call to battle and as a basis for theoretical analysis. However, a number of weaknesses gradually emerged. The first relates to what Bakunin, a leading Russian anarchist in the 19th Century, termed the "red bureaucracy". Implicitly supporting Weber's (Gerth & Mills, 1958, p. 37) concerns regarding communism's potential for bureaucratization,

Marx expressed concerns similar to Weber. Unlike Weber, Marx foresaw a means of avoiding the "iron cage" through the "dictatorship of the proletariat".

Marx's vision of the future eventually produced the worst example of societal rationalization, the "red bureaucracy" referred to by Michael Bakunin, a Russian anarchist.

Avrich (1967) states Bakunin suggested that if one took "the most radical of revolutionaries and put him on the throne of all the Russia's or give him dictatorial powers...before the year is out he will be worse than the Czar himself". Subsequent events in the Soviet Union are a sombre testament to the accuracy of both Bakunin's and Weber's concerns.

As a result of the failure of Marxism, progressive thought during the early 20th Century was left in a quandary. Weber's critique of zweckrationalitat and modernization in Western society was widely accepted; yet events unfolding in the Soviet Union suggested that classical Marxism was unlikely to fulfil its earlier promise. Increasingly, a reinterpretation of Marxist thought that could address the problems of modern Western society seemed necessary. A group of German scholars, who became known as the Frankfurt School, took up this challenge. Thompson and Held (1983) indicate that this group, which began with the establishment of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt during 1923, were responsible for what became known as critical theory.

The Frankfurt School took up the challenge of re-interpreting Marxism within a modern context.

> The critical theorists were concerned, among other things, to interpret the course of twentieth century history, and especially the effects of the First World War, the defeat of left-wing working-class movements, the rise of fascism and Nazism, and the degeneration of the rise of the Russian revolution into Stalinism. While rejecting Marxist-Leninism, the critical theorists nonetheless found in Marx's thought a powerful tool for the analysis of historical events. Among the questions which became central for them were the following: Why did the European radical movements fail to develop into a unified struggle? Why were

> tendencies towards authoritarianism and the expansion of bureaucracy dominant? How, in spite of these tendencies, could theory preserve hope for the future? In changing historical circumstances, how could the revolutionary ideal be sustained and justified? (p. 2)

Under the influence of Horkheimer, who became director of the Institute in 1931, a multi-disciplinary program of study ranging from the social sciences to such diverse areas as music, art, and psychoanalytic theory gradually evolved. Among the first generation of critical theorists, the contributions of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse were particularly significant. Trained within the German philosophical tradition, all three, although committed to a Marxist analysis, believed that further refinement of Marx's original work was necessary.

The Frankfurt School, including theorists such as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, adopted a multi-disciplinary program of study, ranging from the social sciences to art and psychoanalytic theory.

> They agreed that the ideas elaborated in Marx's mature work were an insufficient basis for thecomprehension of contemporary society. The expansion of the state into more and more areas of life, the growth of what they called the 'culture industry', the spread of bureaucracy and instrumental reason (that is, reason defined by the adequacy of means for the attainment of predetermined ends) - all implied that the terms of reference of critique had to be extended. (Thompson & Held, 1983, p. 3)

Bernstein (1985) indicates that the increasing awareness of the role played by instrumental reason in the pathological modernization of society, and the consequent repression and alienation that accompanied this process, led eventually to an analysis that was, in many ways, similar to that of Weber. Horkheimer (1972), for example, published the Dialectic of

The work of early Frankfurt scholars tended to reinforce the essential pessimism of Weber.

Enlightenment in the 1940's; it traced the historical development of instrumental reason, suggesting that the enlightenment ideal of rational self-determination was undermined by its instrumentalist method. As a result, Thompson and Held (1983) suggest, of Weber's work

> [reason ceased]...to be a critical tribunal, reducing itself to a means of describing what is already given. With the development of science and technology, nature is increasingly subjected to the reign of instrumental reason; even human beings are subsumed to objectives which appear as 'fatefully structured, pre-given'. (p. 3)

Despite their concerns regarding the development of an emancipatory analysis, most members of the critical school were eventually trapped in Weber's bleak vision of the iron cage. A few tried to escape. Marcuse (1969), for example, argued that Weber's view of rationality was excessively narrow, suggesting that it served as a means of political domination based upon the supremacy of science and technology. As Thompson and Held (1983) indicate, Marcuse believed that "emancipation from the contemporary form of domination is conditional upon a transformation in the very structure of science and technology" (p. 5).

Marcuse believed that society could avoid the bleak vision of the "iron cage" by transforming the very structure of science and technology. Most concluded that this goal was unrealistic.

The seeming impossibility of this task served only to heighten the school's pervasive sense of despair, reinforcing their bleak conclusions

As Nietzche had predicted, the rationalist tradition of Western thought, stretching back to classical Greece, seemed to have ended in an evolutionary blind alley.

regarding the fate of Western rational thought. Bernstein (1985) suggests that subsequent events, such as the growth of post-structuralist thought, with its emphasis on moral relativism, fostered the impression that the "project of modernity" (p. 25), based upon enlightenment values had failed. Unless a way out could be found, the core values of Western society were meaningless, the lofty tradition dead.

Communicative Rationality: Out of the Impasse

The bleak conclusions reached by the Frankfurt School regarding the seemingly inevitable triumph of instrumental rationality left critical theory at an impasse. No solution seemed possible, at least to early members of the school. It was left to Habermas, a second generation member of the Frankfurt School, to find the way forward. He did so by building upon Marcuse's critique of Weberian rationality. Habermas rejected Marcuse's conclusion that emancipation required the transformation of the structures of science and technology. As Thompson and Held (1983) indicate, Habermas believed that a redefinition of rationality was necessary:

It was left to Habermas, a second generation member of the Frankfurt School, to find the way forward.

Habermas believed a redefinition of rationality was necessary.

> For the development of science and technology, according to Habermas, necessarily unfolds in the dimension of 'purposive-rational action' or 'labour'. Thus, the critique of technocratic consciousness requires us to recognize, not the possibility of an alternative type of science and technology, but rather the existence of another type of action:

> 'communicative action' or 'interaction'. Whereas the rationalization of systems of purposive-rational action may well accord with the Weberian account, this is not the case with the institutional framework of society. The rationalization of the institutional framework demands the removal of obstacles to communication, leading not to the better functioning of the social system but to the creation of conditions for an unrestricted discussion and democratic resolution of practical issues. (pp. 5-6)

Habermas proposed two interdependent forms of rationality: purposive rationality, a means/end form, and communicative rationality, based upon the need for ongoing human dialogue.

In effect, Habermas postulated two interdependent forms of rationality, purposive rationality, based primarily on Weber's zweckrationalitat, and communicative rationality, based upon the need for ongoing human dialogue. Bernstein (1985) suggests that both were directed to the same goal - rationalization or "increasing the rationality or reasonableness of a form of social action" (p. 20). Both are required if a healthy process of social modernization was to occur - yet each is conceptually distinct. Habermas (1979) defined the former as follows:

> Purposive-rational actions can be regarded under two different aspects - the empirical efficiency of technical means and the consistency of choice between suitable means. Action and action systems can be rationalized in both respects. The rationality of means requires technically utilizable, empirical knowledge. The rationality of decisions requires the explication and inner consistency of value systems and decision maxims, as well as the correct derivation of acts of choice. (p. 117)

Purposive rationality is best approached through the use of system theory. Habermas identified economic and administrative sub-systems which

Purposive rationality is best approached through the use of systems theory. McCarthy (1981) states that Habermas identifies two

sub-systems within his systems model: the economic, or monetary sub-system, which encourages the monetarization of the relations between the various economic and noneconomic units; and the power, or administrative subsystem, which increasingly governs the relations between units within the system. Both serve as what Habermas terms the steering media, controlling the relations between the system and the life-world. Habermas (1984) believes it is the unrestrained incursion of the steering media into the life-world that, if left unchecked, will eventually destroy Western society.

he collectively described as the steering media.

The unrestrained incursion of the steering media into the life-world will eventually destroy Western society.

Habermas, like many other writers, is particularly suspicious of attempts to extend the influence of Weber's zweckrationalitat, or purposive rationality, to the traditional life-world. Although a healthy process of societal modernization is necessary, he argues that an emphasis on value free, managerial perspectives will hasten the advent of Weber's iron cage.

While a healthy process of societal modernization is necessary, Habermas agrees that too great an emphasis on value free managerial perspectives will be destructive.

Bernstein (1976) provides a clear illustration of this danger of technocratic rationality when he discusses Popper's support for a "social engineering" approach which is "neutral with regard to the ends to be achieved" (p. 50). The claim of neutrality appears dangerously simplistic. Despite protestations to the contrary, the

Critical theorists view the social engineering or technocratic approach with concern. The claim of neutrality is a dangerous one. Technocratic approaches must be guided by meaningful direction from the life-world.

implicit normative bias of this philosophy seem clear; only a reliance on technocratic solutions will resolve pressing socio-economic problems. The possible use of these techniques in socially destructive ways is ignored. For example, their adoption by social criminals such as Hitler or Stalin is conveniently forgotten. Yet this was precisely Weber's concern. He feared that rationalization of the life-world would mean the removal of decision making power from the average citizen. Instead, it would be vested in the hands of scientific "experts" whose pursuit of technocratic solutions to social problems would then be unimpeded. The intellectual and moral poverty of this perspective is captured eloquently by Weber (Gerth & Mills, 1958):

> Tolstoi has given the simplest answer...: 'Science is meaningless because it gives no answer to our question, the only question important for us: "What shall we do and how shall we live?"' That science does not give us an answer to this is indisputable. The only question that remains is the sense in which science gives no answer, and whether or not science might yet be of some use to the one who puts the question correctly. (p. 143)

In answer to Weber's despairing plea, Habermas proposes a solution to this "paradox of modernity", this process of pathological modernization. He asserts that science and, by implication, the administrative sub-system, can provide answers. However, it must not pose the questions. A process of democratic interaction must guide the functioning of technical rationality. Indeed, a failure to do otherwise will almost certainly lead to the Nietzschean abyss. This process, referred to earlier as communicative rationality, ideally would

Habermas believes that the steering media can provide answers, but the questions, or direction, must be posed by the community engaged in a meaningful process of dialogue or communicative rationality.

guide the operation of the steering media. Habermas (1979) defines communicative rationality as follows:

> Rationalization here means extirpating those relations of force which are inconspicuously set in the very structures of communication and that prevent conscious settlement of conflicts, and consensual regulation of conflicts by means of inter-psychic as well as inter- personal communication. Rationalization means overcoming such systematically distorted communication in which the action-supporting consensus concerning the reciprocally raised validity claims - especially consensus concerning the truthfulness of intentional expressions and the rightness of underlying norms - can be sustained in appearance only, that is counter- factually. (pp. 119-120)

In developing the concept of communicative rationality, Habermas draws heavily upon the work of American pragmatists such as Pierce, Mead, and Dewey and their vision of a radical, participatory democracy.

When a disagreement develops, a process of meaningful disalogue is required to resolve it.

To be effective, communication rationality must exist in an ideal speech environment, with no form of domination, whether moral or institutional in nature.

In developing the concept of communicative rationality, Habermas draws heavily upon the work of American pragmatists such as Pierce, Mead, and Dewey and their vision of a radical, participatory democracy. He poses the necessity of an ideal speech situation. In effect, this means that when a disagreement occurs over a specific issue, a process of dialogue is required to resolve it. An ideal speech environment is necessary; no form of domination, whether moral or institutional in nature, can exist other than the force of the argument itself. Otherwise, communicative rationality cannot operate effectively. As Habermas (1987) suggests, while discussing the power of moral authority in the traditional life-world,

> The authority standing behind knowledge does not coincide with moral authority. Rather, the concept of truth combines the objectivity of experience with a claim to the intersubjective validity of a corresponding

> descriptive statement, the idea of the correspondence of sentences to facts with the concept of an idealized consensus. (p. 72)

Habermas (1987) further suggests that this notion of "an idealized agreement, of an intersubjectivity related to an ideal communication community" (p. 72), is based upon four major claims to validity: comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and rightness.

> In addition to the (implicit) claim that what he utters is comprehensible, the speaker also claims that what he states is true...; that his manifest expression of intentions is truthful or sincere; and that his utterance...is itself right or appropriate in relation to a recognized normative context. (Habermas, 1979, p. xix)

Habermas believes that this process of "mutual understanding", grounded in intersubjective validity claims, is vital to the existence of communicative action. Yet the changes required to achieve this state are far-reaching. Reforms are required that go far beyond current attempts to give disadvantaged groups the financial resources to be heard in decision making forums. The progressive elimination of both societal values and institutions that implicitly conspire to limit the consciousness of individuals is necessary. For example, if people are to work towards true emancipation, they must experience an increased personal sense of freedom and equality in a variety of settings: as children in the home, as students in the school, as employees in the work place, as women in society, and, perhaps most

Habermas contends that the progressive elimination of both societal values and institutions that implicitly conspire to limit the consciousness of individuals is necessary.

importantly, as individuals relating to their own personality structure.

Despite his concern regarding the current pre-eminent role of purposive rationality, Habermas still believes it has an important role to play. A successfully functioning society requires sound management of the steering media. However, he emphasizes the necessity of maintaining a proper balance between communicative and purposive rationality. Purposive rationality should ensure effective management of the economic and administrative sub-systems; communicative rationality, by giving direction to the steering media, establishes the policy framework for this process. In this way, the destructive role played by the steering media in pathological modernization is minimized and, hopefully, transformed through a democratic process of dialogue.

Purposive rationality has a vital role. A successfully functioning society requires sound management of the steering medial. However, communication rationality, utilizing input from the community, must give direction to purposive rationality.

Habermas (1987, p. 320) provides a more literal expression of the relationship between the steering media and life-world, shown in Figure 1. Although constructed from the perception of the system, the need for communicative action as a means of encouraging dialogue between the administrative system and life-world is clearly implied. Another feature of Figure 1 relates to the existence of institutional orders, established as a means of effecting interchange relations

Figure 1 provides a literal expression of the relationship between the steering media and the life-world.

Ideally institutional structures should provide the life-world a means of engaging in meaningful dialogue with the steering media.

between the life-world and system. Ideally these institutional structures should provide the life-world a means of engaging in meaningful dialogue with the steering media.

Unfortunately reality often falls short of the ideal. Habermas (1984) believes that the purposive rational structures of capitalism were producing both pathological organizations and a society rapidly becoming incapable of healthy regeneration. By destroying societies' traditional values and replacing them with a meansend orientation, capitalism has produced a "one dimensional man", an organizational man oriented to hedonistic consumption with little concern for the needs of others. If this process is not reversed, Habermas believes the future for western man is bleak; at best, encouraging a world of sex, drugs, and sports, and at worst, ending in the destruction of all mankind.

Purposive rational structures are producing both pathological organizations and a society rapidly becoming incapable of healthy regeneration.

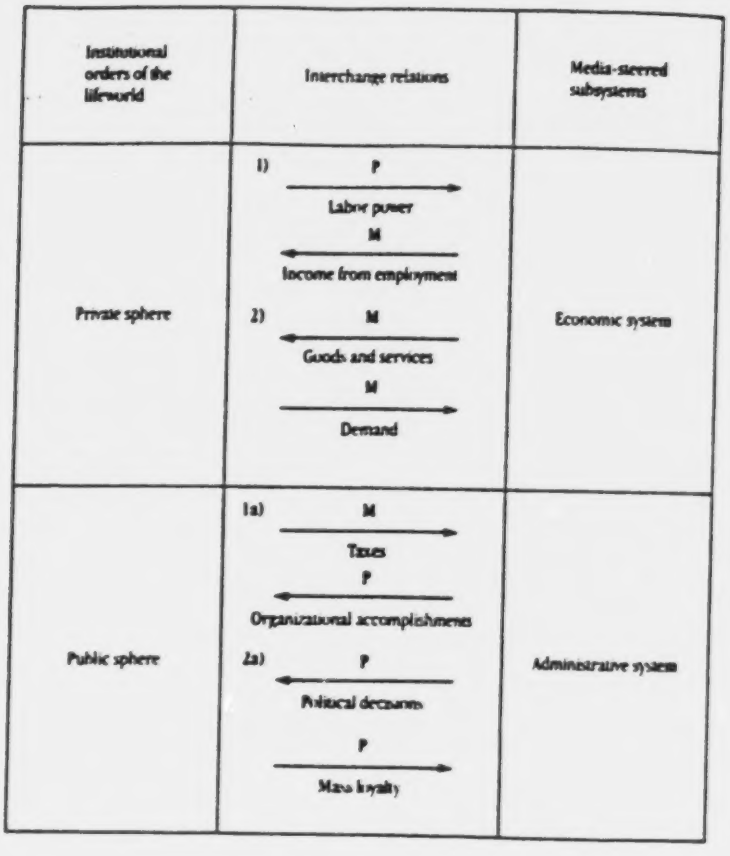

Figure 1. Relations between System and Life-World from the Perspective of the System (Habermas, 1987, p. 320)

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Toward a Conceptual Framework

Critical theory provides a valuable theoretical framework from which to assess the directin of organizational change and the relative centralization of decision making.

Critical theory provides a valuable theoretical framework from which to assess the direction of organizational change and the relative centralization of decision-making. Unfortunately, as noted by Bernstein (1976), Habermas fails to provide a more detailed societal blueprint of the application of critical theory. This certainly applies to the functioning of educational organizations, in particular their decision-making processes. No systematic attempt by Habermas, or other critical theorists, to focus the application of critical theory upon organizational functioning in education has occurred.

Unfortunately, Habermas fails to provide a more detailed societal blueprint of the application of critical thinking.

This apparent deficiency resulted in the development of a proposed conceptual framework to address the issue of educational decision making. This framework is shown as Figure 2, a Critical Model of Educational Decision Making.

This apparent deficiency, with respect to the application of critical theory to an educational context, resulted in the development of a proposed conceptual framework that addresses the issue of educational decision-making. The development of this conceptual framework or model, drew on the work of Habermas (1987), Mintzberg (1983)(, Khandwalla (1977) and Easton (1957. This framework is shown as Figure 2, A Critical Model of Educational Decision Making. This decision-making model addressed a number of the study's key concerns.

These key concerns include a major emphasis upon the institutional structures that relate to the educational decision making process. Included in the model are the local board, division board, and the provincial government, normally represented through the provincial department of education. Although not directly included in the

The model includes a major emphasis upon the institutional structures that relate to educational decision making.

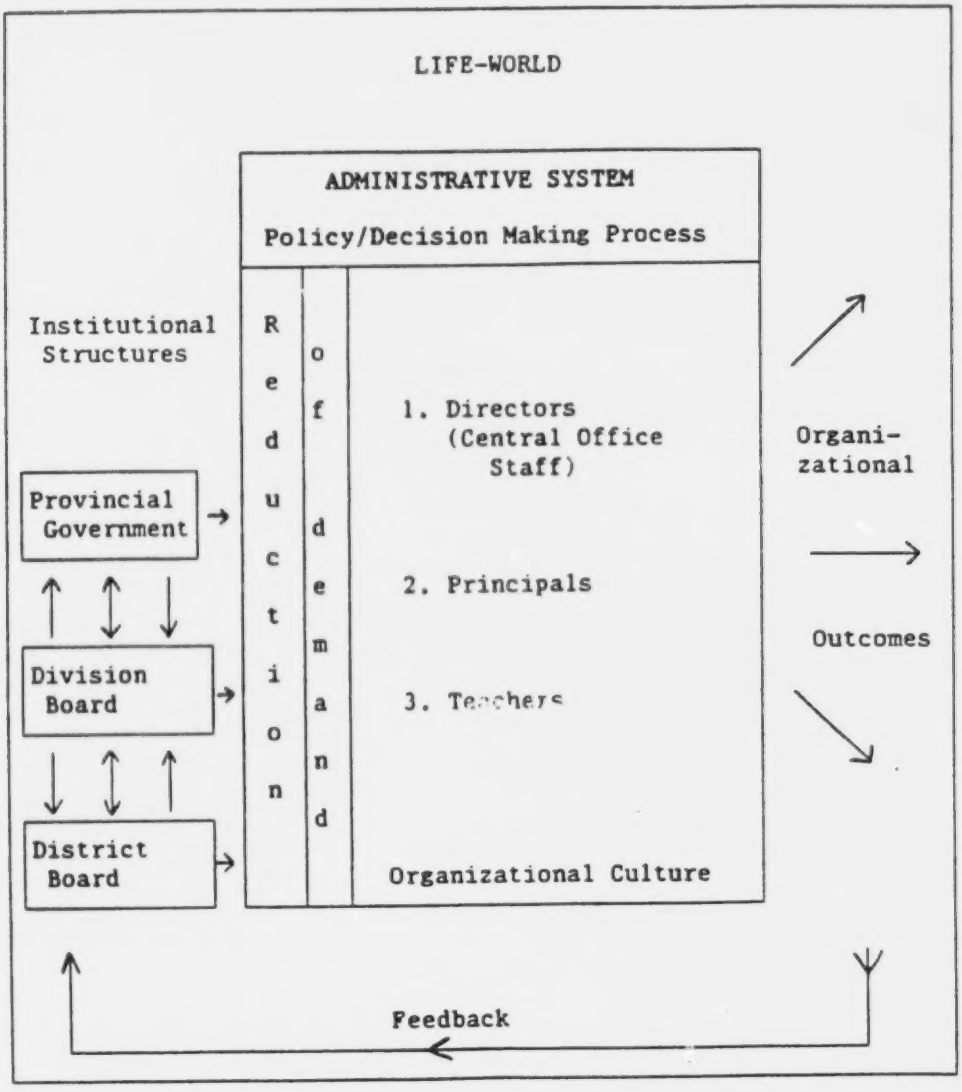

Figure 2. A Critical Model of Educational Decision Making

model, the concepts of vertical and horizontal decentralization are also provided for. Vertical decentralization may be used to describe the downward movement of authority within either the life-world or administrative system. Horizontal decentralization may be used to describe the lateral movement of authority from the administrative system to life-world participants.

The concepts of vertical and horizontal decentralization are also provided for.

The proposed model of educational decision making also leads logically to a key purpose of this study whether educational decision making is becoming increasingly decentralized or centralized, both from a vertical and horizontal context. For example, if vertical decentralization is occurring, research should suggest that both principals and teachers are gaining increased influence. Similarly, increased influence by divisional and local boards would indicate horizontal decentralization. Figure 2 provides a conceptual means of visualizing these issues.

The model relates to a key purpose of this study - whether educational decision making is becoming more decentralized or decentralized, both from a vertical and horizontal context.

It was hoped that the research results would indicate whether modernization, as defined by Habermas was producing positive or dysfunctional consequences within the educational system. This was particularly true for the role played by democratic institutional control structures. If Habermas's concerns regarding pathological

Hopefully, research results will indicate whether positive or dysfunctional modernization is occurring in school systems.

If pathological modernization appears to exist, consideration of strategies for encouraging participation in decision making may be necessary.

modernization appeared to be supported by research results, consideration of possible strategies for encouraging greater participation in control over decision making might be necessary.

THE RESEARCH METHOD

The research method utilized for this study was a triangulation approach. The first dimension of the research method was a quantitative component which involved the development of a questionnaire focusing upon two issues: the relative degree of control that various educational stakeholders exercise over specific administrative decisions, and, the long-term centralization, or decentralization, of control over educational decision making. Since the school division was the basic unit of analysis for the study, questionnaire representation and response was sought from the following groups in each school division: division boards of education, directors of education, district boards, principals, and teachers. An overall response rate of 59.7 percent was eventually achieved.

The research method adopted was a triangulation approach - a quantitative, qualitative, and critical component. The quantitative component involved a questionnaire that focussed on centralization of control over educational decision making.

The second dimension of the research method was a qualitative component, which involved both anecdotal responses from questionnaire respondents, historical analysis, and a modified Delphi technique. With respect to anecdotal responses, questionnaire respondents were provided an opportunity to comment upon the long term direction of control over educational decision making. By comparison, historical and quantitative analysis of archival documents

The qualitative component included anecdotal responses from questionnaire respondents, historical analysis, and a modified Delphi technique.

assessed two issues: demographic trends as they related to school system centralization and, the historical evaluation of administrative structures in Saskatchewan education. Finally, a modified Delphi technique was conducted with 11 prominent individuals in Saskatchewan education. The Delphi technique was incorporated in the study as a means of identifying future trends with respect to the degree of centralization of control over educational decision making.

The third dimension of the research method involved an assessment of research results from the perspective provided by critical theory. This method was adopted as a means of determining the value of critical theory as conceptual framework for assessing the degree of centralization, or decentralization, of control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan.

The third research component involved an assessment of research results from the perspective provided by critical theory.

A research method based upon triangulation was adopted as a means of ensuring that the research results were consistent from a number of perspectives. The results of the study would suggest that this research goal was achieved. The second objective of the research method related to the issue of critical theory as a conceptual framework for assessing the quantitative and qualitative research results of the study. Here, also, it appears that this objective was successfully achieved.

Triangulation was adopted to help ensure research results are consistent. It would appear that this goal was achieved.

The second research objective related to the use of critical theory as a conceptual framework for analysis. Research results suggest that this objective was successfully met.

Critical theory did appear to have value for assessing the research outcomes of the study.

AN ANALYSIS OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL TRENDS

Historical analysis was undertaken as a means of providing context to the study.

As a means of providing context, an analysis of demographic trends with respect to shifts in school population and a review of the historical evaluation of institutional structures at the system level of education in Saskatchewan was undertaken. These data were then used to determine the implications of modernization, as defined within a critical context, for Saskatchewan school systems.

The review of demographic trends painted a clear and consistent picture. Saskatchewan has consistently undergone a process of urbanization.

The review of demographic trends in Saskatchewan education painted a clear and consistent picture. From its original settlement as a rural, agricultural province of small farms, Saskatchewan has consistently undergone a process of urbanization. Population has gradually shifted from a rural to an urban base, with a corresponding impact upon student enrolment patterns and the number of school plants in operation. This shift is clearly outlined in Table 1, Saskatchewan Population Trends Urban and Rural. Similarly, the impact of demographic shifts upon student enrolment patterns and the number of school plants are illustrated in Table 2, Saskatchewan School Enrolment Trends, Urban and Non-Urban, and Table 3, Number of Schools, Urban and Rural.

The study then focused upon the historical evaluation of administrative decision making institutions in Saskatchewan school systems. The historical component commenced with a review of the establishment of the original administrative structures, primarily the school district, followed by a discussion of the Foght Report (1918), which recommends a municipal school system. A review of issues leading to the establishment of larger school units in 1944 was followed by a brief discussion of the findings of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life (1956). Finally, more recent events, such as the proposal to establish regional administrative units (Collins, 1969) and the Scharf Report (1974) were summarized.

An historical review of administrative decision making institutions in Saskatchewan school systems was conducted.

These research results were then assessed from the perspective provided by critical theory. Viewed from a critical perspective, the ongoing consolidation of students in more centralized schools meant that parents and the local community were increasing removed from educational decision making that impacted upon their children. This was viewed as a negative development. Conversely, analysis of historical trends from a critical perspective also suggested that the unwillingness of local communities to meaningfully discuss the implications of problems created by rural depopulation meant that there was little opportunity for administrative and elected officials to

The ongoing consolidation of schools meant that parents and the local community were increasingly removed from educational decision making.

Analysis of historical trends from a critical perspective suggested that the unwillingness of local communities to meaningfully discuss the implication of problems created by rural depopulation made it difficult for elected and administrative officials to explore possible solutions.

explore other solutions to a process which critical theorists would term pathological modernization.

Table 1

Saskatchewan Population Trends, Urban and Rural.[1]

Year	Total	Urban	Rural[2]		
			Total	Farm	Non-Farm
1986	1,009,615	620,200	389,420	161,500	227,920
1981	968,313	563,166	405,147	180,255	224,892
1976	921,325	511,330	409,995	192,570	217,425
1971	926,245	490,635	435,610	233,335	202,275
1966	955,344	468,327	487,017	279,642	207,375
1961	925,181	398,091	527,090	304,672	222,418
1956	880,665	322,003	558,662	360,651	198,011
1951	831,728	252,470	579,258	398,279	180,979
1941	895,992	295,146	600,846	-	-
1931	921,785	290,905	630,880	-	-
1921	757,510	218,958	538,552	-	-
1911	492,432	131,395	361,037	-	-
1901	91,279	14,266	77,013	-	-

[1] Information taken from census data provided by Statistics Canada.

[2] Subsequent to the 1941 census, information was also provided for farm and non-farm categories of the total rural population.

Table 2

Saskatchewan School Enrolment Trends, Urban and Non-Urban.[1]

				Non-Urban[3]		
Year	Total	N-Sask[2]	Urban	Total	Rural Village	Town
1988/89	200,158	5,257	102,972	91,929	87,369	4,560
1985/86	199,909	5,314	100,555	94,040	89,478	4,562
1980/81	204,261	5,734	98,359	100,168	94,179	5,989
1975/76	217,084	-	102,678	114,406	107,566	6,840
1970/71	247,183	4,655	107,947	133,316	125,822	7,574
1965/66	234,309	-	92,415	141,894	132,903	8,991
1960/61	204,689	-	68,746	135,943	119,252	16,691
1955/56	179,166	-	47,124	132,042	59,139	40,140 32,763
1950/51	166,962	-	35,425	131,537	73,686	35,134 22,717
1945/46	173,559	-	32,769	140,790	88,815	32,660 19,315
1940/41	201,390	-	34,101	167,289	114,406	33,366 19,517
1935/36	217,247	-	35,054	182,193	126,819	35,748 19,626
1930/31	230,492	-	36,530	193,962	130,827	39,743 23,392
1925/26	205,962	-	23,755	182,220	122,973	37,179 22,055
1920/21	113,412	-	15,141	98,271	64,769	19,663 13,839
1909/10	63,964	-	24,918	39,046	39,046	- -

[1] Information taken from Annual Reports of the Saskatchewan Department of Education.

[2] Years with no N-Sask enrolment totals noted were recorded in non-urban totals. Department of Education Annual Report did not provide separate statistics for these years.

[3] Prior to 1955/56, non-urban statistics were provided for rural, village, and town categories. Subsequent to this date, non-urban statistics were recorded as rural school divisions and other rural school districts.

Table 3

Number of Schools, Urban and Rural.[1]

School Year	Total	Urban	Rural		
			Total	Division	Non-Division
1988/89	863	311	552	524	28
1985/86	906	317	589	561	28
1980/81	927	314	613	578	35
1975/76	933	306	627	609	18
1970/71	986	311	675	655	20

[1] Information taken from Annual Reports of the Saskatchewan Department of Education.

AN ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

Research results of the questionnaire, provided to division boards of education, directors, district boards, principals and teachers in each school division, were extensive. Research questions related to questionnaire analysis dealt primarily with current, future and preferred degrees of centralization of control over educational decision making of key organizational influences.

The questionnaire dealt primarily with the current, future and preferred centralization of control over educational decision making.

Results of this analysis indicated that the current, future, and preferred role for division boards of education and directors was relatively influential. Similarly it was anticipated that principals, teachers and parents would gain in decision making authority, while district boards currently maintained a relatively minor influence over educational decision making with limited prospects for increases in authority. Most respondents indicated that the education department's degree of control over education decision making in school divisions would remain relatively minor.

The perceived role of division boards of education and directors was relatively influential.

Principals, teachers, and parents will gain decision making authority.

The degree of control over local decision making displayed the provincial education department would remain relatively minor.

With respect to the overall global question of centralization of control over educational decision making, a review of means and standard deviations indicated that respondents believed that a slight tendency towards centralization was occurring. Division and district board

Respondents identified a slight tendency towards centralization.

Elected officials believed that centralization was occurring while directors identified a trend towards decentralization.

respondents appeared to believe that a process of centralization was occurring while directors identified a trend toward decentralization of educational decision making. Interestingly, anecdotal comments of respondents suggested a process of centralization at the provincial level accompanied by increased decentralization of decision making at the school division level. Respondents, regardless of their opinion regarding the future direction of control over decision making, viewed decentralization positively and centralization of control as a negative development.

Anecdotal comments by some respondents suggested a process of centralization at the provincial llevel accompanied by increased decentralization at the school division level.

Respondents consistently viewed decentralization as a positive direction.

AN ANALYSIS OF DELPHI TECHNIQUE RESULTS

Delphi respondents were asked to comment regarding the future direction of centralization, or decentralization, of educational decision making.

The Delphi technique was utilized to assess the perception of eleven individuals who had been influential in Saskatchewan education. These individuals were asked to comment upon the future direction of centralization, or decentralization, of control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school systems.

Part one of the Delphi instrument asked respondents to deal with the potential future role of a number of organizational influencers at the school division level. Respondents first addressed the future role of division boards of education. They commented that in the current difficult fiscal situation, division board would maintain relatively tight control over finances and major policy issues. Increased authority might be delegated to local schools might occur if larger administrative structures were established.

Division boards would maintain relatively tight fiscal control.

Directors of education were also noted by respondents as a group that would increase in decision making power. This would occur in response to a number of increasingly complex educational issues requiring increased levels of educational leadership from directors. If system consolidation were to occur, larger school divisions would create more complex management issues for directors.

Directors would increase in decision making power given the presence of increasingly complex issues. Larger schoool districts, if established, would also reinforce this trend.

Most respondents foresaw only a limited increase in the decision making authority of district boards, unless further system consolidation occurred. However, even if larger administrative units were established, there appeared to be some disagreement among respondents as to the extent, and wisdom, of increased decentralization of authority to district boards.

A limited increase, at most, of authority by district boards was foreseen.

With respect to the future role of the principal, most respondents agreed that the level of responsibility assumed by principals would increase. However, concern was also expressed that, even though the level of responsibility expected of the principal would increase, a corresponding gain in decision making authority would not necessarily occur. Some participant discussion also occurred regarding the wisdom of moving principals to out-of-scope positions. Respondent opinions regarding this possibility were decidedly mixed.

The level of responsibility assumed by principals will increase. However, a corresponding increase in decision making authority would not necessarily occur.

An increasing opportunity for teachers to influence decisions regarding curriculum and classroom related issues was foreseen by respondents. Several respondents suggested that with this increased ability to influence, although not actually make educational decisions, would come increased accountability.

Respondents anticipated an increased role for parents regarding educational decisions that affected their children. It was generally agreed that parents will increasingly demand a more direct role in their children's education. Most respondents anticipated that this demand would produce another force for the decentralization of educational decision making.

An increased role for parents regarding educational decisions that affected their children was anticipated.

Potential changes in rural socioeconomic community infrastructure and their impact upon educational decision making was also addressed in the Delphi process. Respondent comments focused on two levels, including the larger question of the future of rural Saskatchewan and the potential impact upon rural school divisions. With respect to the larger question, most respondents foresaw a declining rural population with a resulting negative impact upon rural communities. At the school division level, respondents envisaged difficult choices that would tend to promote increased centralization of control over educational decision making. In a more general sense, several respondents suggested that the outcome of current conditions might be a future for rural Saskatchewan that contained fewer, and possibly, healthier communities.

Respondents foresaw a declining rural population with a resulting negative impact upon rural communities. Several respondents suggested the future might include fewer, and possibly, healthier rural communities.

The potential for changes in school division boundaries was also reviewed. Respondents agree that a significant potential existed for changes in division boundaries. Some respondents clearly felt such changes were overdue while others were most cautious, noting that a limited potential for financial savings would make selling the concept somewhat difficult. As has already been discussed, most respondents initially stated that consolidation would result in greater decentralization of decision making to the local school level. However, as the Delphi process proceeded, the assumption of increased delegation of decision making to the school level was questioned by several respondents. A number of respondents questioned the need, or wisdom, of decentralization of control to the school level. This perception was shared by a minority of the Delphi participants.

A significant potential existed for changes in division boundaries. Reaction as to the benefit of these potential changes was mixed.

Most respondents believed that school system consolication would result in increased decentralization to the local school level. A minority questioned the need.

Overall, the use of the Delphi technique did not necessarily develop a consensus regarding the future direction of centralization, or decentralization, of control over educational decision making. This was particularly true with respect to the possible consolidation of school divisions. Definite differences of opinion regarding this issue were noted throughout all three cycles of the Delphi process. Given the controversial nature of this particular issue, these results were

No overall consensus regarding the future direction of centralization, or decentralization, of educational decision making was reached.

perhaps to be expected.

THE CONCEPTUAL VALUE OF CRITICAL THEORY

Critical theory was used as a framework for assessing the centralization of control over educational decision making.

This chapter attempted to determine the conceptual value of critical theory as a framework for assessing the centralization of control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school divisions. The first key element of critical theory relevant to this study is the issue of societal modernization. There can be little question that Saskatchewan, in particular rural areas, are undergoing a major process of change. The increase in farm size, with a corresponding impact upon rural population levels land school consolidation, is clearly part of this process. Rural residents are actively resisting this process of change, attempting to maintain the traditional lifestyle that they have known. They would certainly view the current trends overtaking rural Saskatchewan as a pathological process of modernization. Most rural residents would agree that the outcomes of current conditions will be uniformly negative.

Rural residents view current demographic trends as a pathological process of modernization.

The process of modernization, and its potential impact upon rural Saskatchewan, provides the first issue for critical analysis. Several questions arise in regard to this issue. The first question relates to the determination of whether the process of modernization at work in rural Saskatchewan is pathological. Although the traditional life-world in rural Saskatchewan is certainly changing, critical theorists

would suggest that change in itself is not necessarily negative. Although many rural residents would claim that the majority of changes currently affecting rural Saskatchewan are destructive, it might be helpful if an analysis were conducted to determine which changes appear to be pathological and which are simply part of a normal process of modernization.

An analysis to determine which changes appear to be pathological and which are a normal process of modernization would be helpful.

The second issue relates to the issue of citizen participation. It addresses the means by which rural Saskatchewan can maintain its communicative structures given the current pressures of consolidation of schools and school divisions. The first possibility involves leaving the current administrative structures in place. This option assumes the current situation is optimal, a claim that not all respondents in the study would support. It also leaves in place an educational program that increasingly may fail to address the needs of students in a rapidly changing world.

A number of possible solutions regarding citizen participation in educational decision making, given existing trends, could be considered.

A second possible means of maintaining rural communicative structures may be a solution that proposes a limited degree of consolidation, accompanied by an increased emphasis upon alternative program delivery modes such as distance education. While this approach leaves existing administrative structures largely intact, it also effectively

transfers a great deal of control over decisions such as program options, curriculum emphases, and school timetables to the provincial level.

A third possibility for maintaining rural communicative structures while adjusting to forces of modernization might be a process of system consolidation with the increased delegation of decision making power to the local school level. Regardless of the alternative, or combination of alternatives, finally chosen, critical theory would suggest that rural residents need to become actively involved in a process of communicative dialogue designed to permit a meaningful assessment of these issues.

Another vital issue for this study related to the degree of centralization of control over educational decision making in school systems. The findings of this study suggested an increased level of vertical, and to some extent, horizontal decentralization of control over decision making. Yet, these findings also suggested that power will be increasingly centralized in the hands of the director and division boards of education. Overall it appeared that the prospect of school consolidation, larger administrative structures and more authority vested in the hands of director and division boards will produce an

increasing degree of centralization of control over educational decision making. Foster (1986) proposed a possible means of alleviating the impact of this process of centralization. Like Habermas, Foster (1986) suggested that administrators must find ways of involving life-world participants in the process of policy formation. By encouraging life-world participants, such as parents, teachers, and community members, to give policy direction to the administrative system, the negative potential of increased centralization would be partially alleviated.

Foster suggests that ways must befound to involve life-participants, such as parents, teachers, and community members, in education and decision making.

In conclusion, it appeared that critical theory had value as a conceptual framework for the analysis of centralization of control over educational decision making. Although not all the research findings supported its use, on balance the results appeared to justify the claim for critical theory. The ability to use critical theory in a situational perspective seemed to reinforce its conceptual value. However, further research that would explore the potential utility of critical theory as a conceptual framework would be valuable.

Critical theory appears to have value as a conceptual framework for analysis.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The major conclusions drawn from this study may be summarized in three areas: theoretical, methodological, and practical implications. Comments regarding each of these three areas are outlined below.

Theoretical Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

The first major purpose addressed by the study dealt with the centralization or decentralization of control over education decision making. Essentially the research identified a number of trends that would tend to encourage an increased degree of centralization of control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school systems. However, trends that would encourage a tendency towards increased decentralization of decision making were also identified.

Trends that would suggest both increased centralization and decentralization were identified.

The second major purpose addressed in this study dealt with the efficacy of critical theory as a conceptual framework for the analysis of research results. Based upon the conclusions reached in Chapter 8, it appeared that critical theory provided a sound conceptual framework from which to assess the research results of the study. It further appeared that critical theory may have additional potential for use in identifying possible means by which the divergent tendencies of centralization and decentralization may be resolved.

Critical theory provided a sound conceptual framework from which to assess research results.

Based upon these theoretical conclusions, the following implications for further research are outlined below.

Further theoretical development regarding the application of critical theory to educational practise would be valuable.

1.Further theoretical development regarding the application of critical theory to the area of educational practise would be valuable. Critical theory, as outlined by Habermas, appears to hold considerable promise as an alternative theoretical paradigm, the development which may provide valuable insight with respect to educational practise. The work of Foster (1986) may provide a valuable frame of reference for further work in this area.

Habermas may provide a theoretical basis for incorporating the divergent trends of both centralization and decentralization identified in the study.

2.The reconciliation of somewhat divergent trends regarding the centralization and decentralization of educational decision making merits further investigation. It may be, based upon the theoretical framework outlined by Habermas, that organizational models incorporating both of these trends can be developed.

Further research that incorporated the perception of parents and community members might prove helpful.

3.This study deliberately adopted a theoretical framework that primarily addressed the issue of life-world participation through institutional structures such as the education department, division boards of education, and district boards of trustees. Additional research that assessed the perception of parents and community

representatives as life-world participants may provide a different perspective regarding the issues addressed in the study.

4. Further research to help clarify the situational nature of educational decision making may provide a more complete perspective regarding the ways in which important decisions are made within school divisions.

5.Research results suggested that rural respondents tended to assess a higher degree of control over educational decision making to all influencer groups. Additional research to determine possible reasons for this variance between rural and urban respondents would be beneficial.

Research to determine why rural respondents, as compared to urban respondents, assess a higher degree of control over decision making to all influence groups would be helpful.

6.Analysis of questionnaire results suggested a positive relationship between school divisions with positive morale and the degree of control over decision making exercised by influencer groups. Further research to help determine possible linkages between system morale and degree of control over educational decision making may produce interesting findings.

Research to explore possible linkages between system morale and control over decision making might prove interesting.

Research Method and Recommendations for Future Research

The discussion of research method that follows relates to three major issues. The first issue concerns the two manners in which triangulation was utilized in this study. The second issue relates to the impact of critical theory upon the research method. The final issue relates to specific suggestions for improvement in the research methodology used in this study.

Triangulation was adopted as a means of cross-checking research results.

The first issue relates to the research method adopted for this study, which incorporated the concept of triangulation on two different dimensions. The first dimension dealt with the definition of triangulation, described by Denzin (1978) as a combination of research methods used to study the same phenomenon. Using this approach, it becomes possible to cross-check results from the various methods used in the study to determine whether there is a consistency of research outcomes. This study adopted this approach to the research method. It incorporated the use of the questionnaire as a survey instrument, written anecdotal feedback from questionnaire respondents, demographic and historical analysis, and the Delphi technique as elements of the research design. Based upon the relative consistency of findings from the various research methods, it would appear that the utilization of triangulation was successful.

However, this study also attempted to adopt a broader conceptual frame of reference with respect to the research method. This broader perspective was based upon the view of research method provided by critical theory. Bernstein (1976) commented that an adequate social and political theory should be empirical, interpretative, and critical. This claim was supported by Habermas (1984) and Offe (1984) who commented upon the need for a variety of methodological perspectives when conducting research related to the steering media.

Foster (1986) further reinforced this research perspective with his comment that "critical theory has no argument with the quantitative and empirical studies of human behaviour; only when these are seen as the only ways of gaining information are they called into question" (pp. 74-75) For these reasons, the decision was made to adopt a process of triangulation on a broader conceptual level. Rather than focusing upon specific research techniques, an attempt was made to utilize research methods that would incorporate a quantitative dimension, a qualitative dimension, and, finally, a critical dimension. Based upon the outcomes of the study, it appears that this decision had merit. The quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the triangulation exercise appeared to produce relatively consistent research outcomes. The subsequent

utilization of a critical dimension provided a valuable normative perspective from which to analyze the research outcomes of the study.

Two concerns existed regarding the research method. The first involved the survey questionnaire which appeared to be unnecessarily complex. The second involved the Delphi process which presented difficulties in ensuring that respondents remained focused upon the primary issues.

The third major issue discussed in relationship to methodology relates to the specific research methods adopted for use in this study. Two concerns exist in relation to the research methods. The first concern involves the survey questionnaire which, in retrospect, appeared to be unnecessarily complex given its role in the study. The second concern relates to the Delphi technique and the difficulty experienced in ensuring that respondents remained focused upon the primary question, the centralization of educational decision making in school systems. Both these concerns will be discussed more extensively in the implications for further research which are outlined below.

Based upon these conclusions with respect to the issue of triangulation and suggestions for the improvement of the actual research methods used in the study, three implications regarding research methodology are reported.

1. The adoption of a triangulation approach that incorporated a variety of research methods appeared to be worthwhile, in terms of research outcomes. By obtaining relatively consistent results from a variety of research methods, a greater degree of certainty existed with

respect to the validity of these findings. In addition, the variety of research outcomes also provided an enhanced sense of "depth" when interpreting the results. Research outcomes from one type of method became more intelligible when interpreted in light of complementary results from another research method.

2. The utilization of critical theory as a conceptual framework from which to normatively assess the research results obtained from quantitative and qualitative methods appeared to be a valuable practise. Not only did critical theory provide a conceptual framework from which to interpret the findings of the study, it also helped identify possible solutions to issues of concern that were identified in the study.

3. In retrospect, it would appear that the design of the survey questionnaire was unduly complex. Given the utilization of triangulation in the study, an unnecessarily detailed level of information was requested from respondents. While the additional richness of detail may have added to the study, this must be balanced by the increased amount of administrative inconvenience required of respondents. Overall, it appeared that a less complex survey questionnaire would have been adequate for the research objectives of the study.

Implications for Practise

Based upon the research outcomes of this study, the following implications for practise are reviewed below.

1.Serious consideration should be given to the decline in student enrolments in rural Saskatchewan. Historical and economic trends indicate that this decline in rural student enrolments is likely to continue. Whether the eventual outcome of this situation is further consolidation of schools and school divisions or some other solution to the problem, rural residents need to be actively involved in a process of consultation.

Rural residents need to be actively involved in a process that explores the implications of declines in student enrolment in rural areas.

2.In conjunction with the process of consultation outlined above, a more detailed study of further system consolidation and possible means by which the resulting centralization of control could be offset should be undertaken. Whether these possible means of countering increased centralization would include a greater degree of control over local issues for influencer groups at the school level, or some other solution, remains to be seen.

Research that would help determine means by which increasing centralization of control could be offset would be valuable.

3.Greater attention to the growing trend towards increased parent involvement in schooling needs to be provided by practitioners. Whether this process of parental involvement could be accommodated

Accommodating the growing trend to parent involvement in schoolsl must be addressed.

by an increased role for parents in district boards or advisory committees, as one Delphi respondent suggested, or some other approach should receive careful consideration from elected officials and senior administrators.

4.The need for greater decentralization of decision making control among urban school divisions, as was suggested by another Delphi respondent, also requires further consideration. A failure to do so may result in increased parental alienation from the educational system, with future negative outcomes for students, schools, and school systems.

Increasing decentralization of control in urban school divisions requires further consideration.

5.The issue of professionalization in education should be carefully reviewed. Further discussion of a possible redefinition of professionalism, based upon a critical perspective, would be helpful. Ideally educators and elected officials would identify an approach to professionalism that incorporated the issue of broader participation in educational decision making, whether at the classroom, school, or system level.

Further research regarding a possible redefinition of professionalism, based upon a critical perspective, would be valuable.

6. Some attention should be given to the possible incorporation of an increased emphasis on critical theory as an aspect of professional

Consideration of a greater emphasis on critical theory in professional training programs is necessary.

training programs for educational administration. As Foster (1986) has suggested, administrative practise may require a reduced focus on structural-functionalist models of operation and increased emphasis on a critical perspective in the day to day functioning of educational administrators.

7. Given the concerns expressed by many Delphi respondents regarding the dangers involved in too proactive a lobbying role by LEADS, senior educational administrators should carefully review this issue to ensure that their professional association represents their views using the most constructive means possible. A failure to do so may result in increasingly negative perceptions regarding the role of LEADS in addressing important policy issues in Saskatchewan education.

Attention must be given to concerns expressed by many Delphi respondents that too active a lobbying role by LEADS is not always constructive.

A Concluding Comment

The impetus for this study came from the writer's perception of the potential for increased centralization of control over educational decision making in Saskatchewan school systems. This potential for greater centralization existed for several reasons. These included increased consolidation of schools and school divisions in response to current demographic and economic trends. The reasons also included

a perception by the writer that educational administrators tended to resist direct community involvement in educational decision making.

Although this study confirmed a trend towards increased centralization of control over educational decision making, it also identified a concurrent trend towards increased parental involvement. Hopefully the developments such as increased parental participation will provide a force for decentralization that will help offset the forces for centralization referred to above. If the process of communicative dialogue, as defined by Habermas (1987, 1984), operates effectively, both the need for increased consolidation and greater participation in educational decision making can be accommodated by new organizational practices and/or structures that will evolve.

Ahtough the study results suggests a trend towards increased centralization, it also identified a trend towards increased parent involvement.

Communication rationality, as defined by Habermas, may provide a means of reconciling the apparently divergent tendencies towards centralization and decentralization.

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